

**MINUTES
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
COUNCIL OF BASIC EDUCATION**

**333 Market Street | 1st Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126**

July 14, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 1:53 p.m. by Council Chair Lee Williams.

Attending:

James Agras	Reva Gandhi	Jonathan Peri
Carol Aichele	Pamela Gunter-Smith	Taiba Sultana
Nathan Barrett	Sarah Jordan	Karen Farmer White
Jamie Bracey-Green	Jeffrey Keeling	Lee Williams
Sandra Dungee Glenn	Hon. Mark Longietti	Hon. Lindsey Williams

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the March 10, 2021, meeting of the Council of Basic Education were approved on an **Aichele/Keeling** motion.

**REPORT OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Acting Deputy Secretary Sherri Smith delivered a presentation on the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER). Dr. Smith shared that Pennsylvania received a total ARP ESSER award of \$5.001 billion. Two-thirds of that aid was made available to the Pennsylvania Department of Education in March 24, 2021 and must be awarded by March 24, 2022. Dr. Smith said the Department must apply to the U.S. Department of Education for the remaining third of the funds. Funds may be used for pandemic-related costs dating back to March 1, 2020 and all funds must be obligated by September 30, 2024.

Dr. Smith discussed the stakeholder engagement conducted by the Department to inform the state's plans for its use of ARP ESSER funds. She shared that the top three funding priorities identified by stakeholders were: 1) supports for student and teacher mental health, 2) addressing connectivity and equity of access in remote learning, leading to instructional and learning inequities, and 3) staffing shortages and a lack of capacity in school and county supports.

Dr. Smith then reviewed federal requirements for the allocation of ARP ESSER funds, as well as requirements for local education agencies that receive such funding to dedicate portions of their award to addressing learning loss and to adopt health and safety plans that provide for a

safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services. Dr. Smith also noted that the allowable 2.5% of the ARP ESSER award for state-directed activities will support entities not eligible for Title I-A Funding and those serving the highest-need populations, including Career and Technical Centers, Intermediate Units, services for youth in local correctional institutions, and more. Dr. Smith further shared that the state administrative set-aside of ARP ESSER will cover the increased state-level costs related to managing ARP awards and reporting through 2025.

Dr. Smith stated that ARP ESSER includes three state-level reservations for activities and interventions as follows: 1) 1% for evidence-based summer enrichment programs, 2) 1% for evidence-based comprehensive afterschool programs, and 3) 5% for evidence-based interventions aimed specifically at addressing learning loss. Pennsylvania's total state-level reservations for addressing these requirements is approximately \$350 million, and Dr. Smith discussed how the state budget allocated these reserves. Dr. Smith noted that activities and interventions supported by state-level ARP ESSER reservations must respond to students academic, social, and emotional needs and must address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on certain underserved student groups. She further elaborated on how these funds would be focused to support each of the three required areas, along with providing support for educators in the science of literacy.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Wolf, a bus driver for a Pennsylvania school district, stated that the emergency declaration for COVID-19 has been cancelled. Ms. Wolf said she wanted to raise concerns regarding the Biden administration declaring school buses to be public transportation. Ms. Wolf drew distinctions between school buses and other modes of public transportation because they are separately licensed through the state, drivers have separate written and behind the wheel testing, school bus drivers have a roster of riders and only transport school age students to specific schools, school buses assign seats, and school buses have designated stops. Ms. Wolf said school buses do not have air conditioning (AC) and that following CDC guidance to wear masks on public transportation would be extremely difficult for school bus drivers who are in buses with no AC for hours. Ms. Wolf further state that, because the emergency declaration is cancelled, she is fully liable. Under the state's child abuse code, Ms. Wolf said if she covers the mouth and nose of a child and obstructs their breathing, she is committing child abuse. She stated that, as a mandated reporter, she cannot logically do this without serious consequences that could fall on her if a parent decides to sue her because a child passes out or has a stroke because they can't breathe due to the 100 degree temperatures at the beginning of the school year. Ms. Wolf said everyone wore masks last year because of the mask mandates that was at place – even during recess. She said that recess during that time was silent and without joy, and that all of this needs to be taken into consideration as we address the mental health of our youth relevant to the CDC's recommendation that elementary age students should be masked.

ACTION ITEMS

There were no action items.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. on an **Aichele/Keeling** motion.

Stephanie Jones

Stephanie Jones
Administrative Assistant